CHAPTER I

HISTORY OF CHINESE IMMIGRATION TO CANADA

Canada like the United States of America is a nation of immigrants. Today Canada is among the few nations with the highest immigrant populations. In the year 2011, over 20 % of Canada’s total population consisted of immigrant people, which is the highest among the G8 countries.\(^1\) This has been possible mainly due to the impressive diversity of work opportunities offered by Canada to its people as also due to the vigorous social, political, economic as well as multicultural policy and several family reunification schemes followed by her over the past many years. Canada has in fact accommodated people from practically all parts of the world to emerge as a true multicultural state. The journey of course has been long and eventful. This chapter will focus on an important aspect of Canada’s immigration history: the arrival, settlement and experience of the Chinese in Canada. It will also attempt to investigate the reasons behind the large-scale emigration of the Chinese people to Canada and the consequences of this exodus on the Chinese community in Canada as well as on the host nation of Canada.

The advent of the Chinese in Canada is an important event as they were the first Asians to come to North America and with their arrival, the fabric of Canada underwent a remarkable change. Several changes, mainly social, economic and political, occurred as a
result of which Canadian society was remoulded, reshaped and redefined. How and why these happened is the essential subject of this chapter. At the same time, why the Chinese came at all from Asia to the freezing North American country and what their experiences were like, is also a dominant concern of this chapter. The chapter will try to look into the immigration of the Chinese to Canada from two perspectives, that of the Chinese who chose to leave their homeland for a new life in an alien nation and from the perspective of Canada, the host country that provided them with work and opportunities and underwent many changes with the arrival of so many immigrants on its soil.

When we speak of the Chinese in Canada, we refer to the immigrant people who claim their descent from China directly or indirectly. ‘The People’s Republic of China…has always considered itself the legitimate government of China, of which Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macao are integral parts’ (Li, Encyclopedia 357). Canada and The People’s Republic of China established formal diplomatic relations with each other in the year 1971. Chinese emigration occurred on a large scale chiefly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. A number of “push and pull” factors were responsible for this. Events in China as well as upheavals in the host nations combined to cause the large scale exodus of the Chinese people all over the world especially to south-east Asia, North America and the Pacific Islands. Many reasons have been attributed to this including the social unrest perceived in Hong Kong with the Cultural Revolution, the undecided fate of Hong Kong until its return to China in 1997 as also the incident at Tianenmen Square in 1989 (Li, Encyclopedia 357). Other reasons which led to the emigration include the abject poverty of the Chinese peasants who willingly went abroad
as contract labourers to plantation societies. Though China had prosperous trading relations with many south-eastern countries, emigration in the true sense of the term started only towards the end of the Manchu rule (1644-1911) around the middle of the nineteenth century. As China’s imperial order waned, there was an explosion of her population without any corresponding increase in her agricultural productivity. To add to her woes, natural disasters like floods and famines rocked the land driving people to starvation and utter misery. Farm tenancy was also high and in a region like Guangdong, from where thousands emigrated, 70% of the farming community in 1888 comprised of tenants. In North China, more than a quarter of the rural households did not own lands. Those who were land owners were hardly better off as the practice of “partible inheritance” which ensured the equal division of land among the sons led to the gradual truncation of each person’s share. Further, “the tenancy system and the inheritance system discouraged mechanization of agricultural production and limited farm yields” (Li, Encyclopedia 356). All these factors piled up to account for the massive outpouring of the Chinese people all over the world.

It may be observed that it was chiefly economic causes that lay at the root of China’s large scale emigration. With rigid laws of inheritance and obsolete systems of tenancy coupled with an aversion to mechanization nothing seemed favourable to the hapless Chinese peasant. Moreover, with the influx of foreign powers and China’s defeat in the Opium War against Britain, she was indeed in an unenviable position. A host of powerful nations started exploiting China’s raw materials and manpower and reduced her to a market for foreign goods. China repeatedly lost in foreign wars with Britain, France,
Italy, Japan, and the United States of America and so on. The main motive of these
countries was to secure trading rights and territorial concessions from China. The foreign
incursions proved to be the proverbial straw that broke the camel’s back. With war and
poverty battering him to a hopeless future the stage was in fact being set for the Chinese
to explore opportunities for survival in a new country, other than his homeland. Political
causes thus allied with economic causes to contribute towards the huge emigration of the
Chinese to the west.

The first generation of emigrants was in fact literally pushed out of their
homeland to seek a better future elsewhere. Later, other than economic and political
factors, cultural and social factors also resulted in a great wave of emigration, but the
primary reason for Chinese emigration to other lands was because of the need to find
alternative means of livelihood and needless to say, their pathetic condition was fully
exploited by western powers that exacted cheap labour from them while promising them
the good life.

Chinese immigration to Canada may be roughly divided into three periods. The first starts
from the earliest arrivals in about 1858 to 1923. The second period spans over a period
covering 1924 to 1947. The years following World War II constitute the third phase of
Chinese immigration to Canada. According to written records in China, a monk by the
name of Hwui-Shan visited a region of wilderness in 499 believed to be Canada (Li,
*Encyclopedia* 358). In 1788 some ship builders came to Canada it is believed but little is
known about them.\(^2\) Immigration however in the real sense of the term began only in
1858. Like the Japanese who use the term ‘Nikkei’ to refer to the overseas Japanese, the Chinese too had their own term, ‘Huaqiao’ which meant Chinese nationals living out of China or “overseas Chinese”. In Canada particularly, the term “Chinese–Canadian” is used to denote people of Chinese ancestry (Li, *Encyclopedia 355-356*).

**Table One**

**Number of Chinese in Canada, 1881 – 1991**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total No of Chinese in Canada</th>
<th>Males per 100 females</th>
<th>Native born %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>4,383</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>9,129</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>17,312</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>27,831</td>
<td>2,790</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>39,587</td>
<td>1,533</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>46,519</td>
<td>1,241</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>34,627</td>
<td>785</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>32,528</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>58,197</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>1,18,851</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>289,245</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>656,645</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Canadian census data, 1911-91.


Note: Total Number of Chinese in Canada for 1991 is based on Single, and Multiple origin figures combined.
Table Two

The Chinese population in Canada, by province and territory, 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province and Territory</th>
<th>Total Chinese population (in thousands)</th>
<th>As a percentage of the provincial/territorial population</th>
<th>As a percentage of the total Chinese population in Canada</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newfoundland and Labrador</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince Edward Island</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nova Scotia</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Brunswick</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quebec</td>
<td>63.0</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontario</td>
<td>518.6</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>47.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manitoba</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saskatchewan</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alberta</td>
<td>108.1</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Columbia</td>
<td>373.8</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>34.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yukon</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northwest Territories</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nunavut</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Canada</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,094.7</strong></td>
<td><strong>3.7</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada.

Just as economic reasons lay at the root of Chinese emigration, Canada’s immigration policies were guided by her economic and social needs. Being a large nation, politically fragile and enmeshed in linguistic, political, social, cultural, economic and financial embroils, she sought to frame her immigration policies in a manner that would boost her market needs, augment her thin population and help create a pure white state (Abu-Laban and Gabriel 37-39). The visionaries of the Canadian Confederacy that came into being on 1.7.1867, however did not contend for the fact that in their pursuit of racial purity and fulfillment of market demands, they would have would have to admit not in hundreds but thousands, people from places as far as China and Japan among others to create their ideal state.

During the first phase of Chinese immigration to Canada, the Chinese suffered terrible atrocities. During the second phase of immigration, popularly called the Exclusion era, hardly any Chinese were allowed entry to Canada. After World War II, those who entered Canada were either family members of the immigrants or professionals and even students. They were more educated than their predecessors. The various discriminatory legislations against the Chinese had also been lifted and entry to Canada was easier. In its pursuit of creating a multicultural state Canada admitted many people of Asian and hence Chinese descent.
According to the first census after Confederation in 1871, the majority of the population of Canada, including British Columbia, were French, followed by the English. There was no mention of the Chinese who were already present in British Columbia though the English, French, the Dutch, Irish, Scottish, Blacks or Natives were mentioned (Kelley and Trebilcock 22). This omission could be attributed to several factors. Perhaps the census was completed hastily, or perhaps the Chinese being essentially sojourners at this stage continually shifted base, or perhaps racist considerations prevented census officers from including them in their count. Marjorie P. Kohli however writes that when the census was taken in 1871, fifty three Chinese women were reportedly living in British Columbia, though there were more Chinese men.\(^3\) It may perhaps be concluded that there certainly was a Chinese presence in Canada which may or may not have been officially recorded, all the more since Canada was encouraging immigration through advertisements, agents and promotional activities in order to add to her labour force to help tap her rich natural resources and develop her industrially. This period was in fact the ‘golden age’ of Canadian immigration history (Kelley and Trebilcock 107).

It was not only hardy males who were sought to populate Canada, but sturdy women, preferably white were highly sought after as well, first to work as domestic helps--- an economic need and secondly to assimilate and increase the white race in their ‘future roles as wives and mothers.’ Those considered racially impure like Asians and Blacks were discouraged from entry. Accusations ranged from being ‘alien’, of ‘lower races’, ‘Mongrel race’, ‘depraved’ and so on. Chinese women in particular were actively discouraged from entering Canada by legislation (Abu-Laban and Gabriel 38-39).
It was the lure of gold that first attracted the Chinese to Canada just as it had to the U.S.A. The Chinese had named America- ‘Gumsaan’ or the gold mountain and it was in the 1850s that a large number of Chinese arrived from China and America during the Fraser Canyon Gold Rush in Vancouver Colony Island. The news of the gold first saw the Chinese rushing in from California, but later thousands of migrants came from China itself. During the 1860s and 1870s many Chinese came as independent miners and workers, many were even recruited as contract or even indentured labourers. It is believed that the first Chinese arrived in Victoria in 1858. The trip was arranged by Hop kee and Co. of San Francisco for three hundred Chinese persons who were sent with Allen Lowe & Co. onboard the Carribean to Victoria. Later more charters were arranged by Companies in San Francisco and Hong Kong in a similar organized manner (Wickberg 13). When British Columbia entered the Confederation in 1871, there were already 3000 Chinese in its population. The immigrants were mostly men who had come in search of gold and were essentially sojourners who wished to earn a substantial fortune and then return home to their families. This also explains the reason behind presence of only a small number of women in the migrant Chinese population.

Chinese labour was sought for its cheapness as also for its use of superior technology. In the Fraser Valley, the Chinese migrant workers stayed on longer than others. Other migrants soon abandoned the Fraser Valley for the Cariboo Gold Rush and other gold fields in British Columbia. Many even returned to the U.S.A when the gold started depleting. Those who remained retreated to their ethnic enclaves which grew into
Chinatowns and became prominent in places like Barkville, in Cariboo, Richfield, Stanley, Quesnel and so on. References to these enclaves are a major feature in the writings of the Chinese-Canadian Diaspora.

It was not in the gold fields alone that Chinese labour was sought. The Chinese were much in demand for the laying of Canada’s railway lines and some 15,000 labourers were brought to Canada for the purpose of working on the western leg of the Canadian Pacific Railways (Kelley and Trebilcock 94). The Chinese were the main force in building a large section of the Canadian Pacific Railway right from the Pacific to the Eagle Pass in British Columbia. When British Columbia joined the Confederation in 1871, one of the conditions was that the Dominion Government would build a railway linking British Columbia with eastern Canada within ten years. Chinese labour was openly preferred when Canada’s first Prime Minister Sir John Macdonald told the parliament that the Chinese labour force was a necessity and even though he was not in favour of ‘Mongolians becoming permanent settlers’, he felt that the only option for them was to choose between the Chinese or the Railways (Kelley and Trebilcock 94-95).

Chinese labour was prized for many reasons, first it was cheap, the Chinese worked at wages 30 to 50 percent lower than that paid to White labourers (Kelley and Trebilcock 94). Grinding poverty had driven hapless Chinese peasants through sickness, starvation, disease and --- hope to the shores of America. Being a hardy and industrious race they were willing to work hard at low rates with the ultimate intention of returning to their homes in the Guangdong and Fujian provinces after amassing little fortunes.
Chinese labour was also preferred due to the mildness of their nature. Though often targets of organized mob furies and public ire they remained steadfast and worked with diligence. Another reason which added to the popularity of their demand was the availability of the Chinese migrant in the west coast of Canada, since they travelled from the east by sea, round to the west coast. It was an enormous problem for the railway contractors to transport other migrants who arrived on the east coast across the mainland for employment in the rail lines. Thousands of Chinese came to Canada to assist in the building of the western section of the Canadian Pacific Railway. They were mostly from the lower section of society even though some of the merchant class also came.

Records of immigrants entering Canada between 1885 and 1903 indicate that male labourers made up 73 percent; merchants and storekeepers, 5.7 percent; and cooks, farmers, laundrymen, miners and others for the remaining. (Li, *Encyclopedia* 358)

Andrew Onderdonk the railway contractor in charge of the British Columbia section openly preferred Chinese immigrants since there was a shortage of workforce in the west and American navvies were far from willing to travel up north to work at such poor wages (Kelly and Trebilcock 94). About 15,000 Chinese men came to work in the rail sites and made possible the colossal work of building the Canadian Pacific Railway.

Describing the condition of the Chinese rail workers, Arlene Chan writes in her book, *The Chinese in Toronto from 1878: From Outside to Inside the Circle*, that the Chinese workers were underpaid compared to the Whites (19). In fact disease and death were so frequent that often the accident or death of a Chinese simply went unreported.
Little however is known about the lives of the Chinese labourers in the Railway camps as no Chinese diaries or records of the times survive (Wickberg 22).

The early migrants lived in settlements populated by only the Chinese. These were crude and exposed the workers to cold and disease. Despite such grueling hardships however, the Chinese labourer continued to work and though many died, the others showed exemplary spirit in braving the weather, pitiful working conditions and severe discrimination to carry out their work diligently and to give Canada her railroad. Later with the advent of more Chinese, the settlements grew into what is popularly known as Chinatowns. The rail towns that were built were exclusively for the whites while most immigrants lived in temporary canvas tents. The Chinese started building their community lives along the rail lines and later with the advent of a greater number of their own folk their ethnic retreats developed into towns and centers of Chinese culture and identity. It was not only around the railway lines but also around coal mines, saw mills and farms that Chinese community life was organized (Wickberg 24).

The term Chinatown has drawn a lot of criticism from scholars who have looked upon it as a term that is a “nineteenth-century European concept superimposed upon a group that was seen as racially inferior and culturally debased” (Li, Encyclopedia 358). However with the passage of time the term was accepted by the Chinese and Europeans alike. Canadian writers of Chinese descent have situated their novels mostly in Chinatowns and constantly employ the term in their writings. The first Chinatown was established in Victoria in 1858 (Poy 3). These ethnic townships were the perfect retreats
for the marginalized Chinese but slowly witnessed social evils such as prostitution and opium addiction. The Whites never lost an opportunity to lash out at the Chinese and Chinatowns for their unhygienic practices, lack of civic sense or supposed vices but it may be worth mentioning that the Chinese were pushed into an overcrowded unhygienic existence by the severe discrimination they faced from society. The crude shacks they lived in during the days of the railway laying gave way and eventually developed into Chinatowns which became a symbol of Chinese life and culture in Canada. They were also to become prominent symbols of Canada’s multicultural face in later years.

For all their industry and laborious contribution, the Chinese were paid incredibly low wages, often less than $1 per day. Other workers, including other migrants or even the natives were paid far higher wages and given better living conditions. The lot of the Chinese appeared to be the worst. They were exposed to great dangers, many lost their lives in explosions, while others lived in small tents at the mercy of inclement weather conditions and illnesses and diseases. By around 1881, many Chinese workers had left the railway site for goldmines or had become victims of diseases. With the news of the discovery of gold, many deserted their jobs and hence arrangements were made with Chinese contractors in China to provide labour. The railways were completed in 1885 but despite their enormous contribution the Chinese were left out of the celebrations of this glorious event. Arlene Chan writes:

Borne on the backs of the industrious Chinese labourers who comprised three-quarters of the railway workforce, the crowning achievement that united Canada was celebrated with not one Chinese in attendance. Nor were there
any references made about them in the countless news articles written at the time (Chan 22).

On the contrary, after the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway, several Chinese were left with no work, creating a major source of concern to the immigrant and to the host country alike. While the migrant had to look for other opportunities for survival, the government of Canada had to handle a sizeable population that was steadily growing in size. Though the Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King was in favour of retaining the Chinese due to the trade relations shared by the two countries, the people in general were against the Chinese and often organized themselves into mobs to terrorise them. In order to deal with the situation, The Chinese Immigration Act was passed in 1885, whereby a head tax of $50 was levied on every Chinese immigrant entering Canada. The legislation had an impact on the flow of immigrants to Canada but it did not stop the process. In 1900, the government of Canada increased the tax to $100, by The Chinese Immigration Act 1900. Later by The Chinese Immigration Act of 1903 the landing tax was increased to $500 (Li, Encyclopedia 359).

The cruelest cut came when the taxes were replaced by the Chinese Immigration Act of 1923, to mercilessly cut down on Chinese immigration to Canada. The legislation, popularly called the Chinese Exclusion Act was extended to all except ‘merchants, students, diplomats and their staff, or Canadian-born Chinese children who had left for educational or other purposes’ (Kelley and Trebilcock 203). The Exclusion Act came into effect from 1st July, 1923 and all Chinese who had entered Canada before this date had to register themselves with local authorities and were forbidden from leaving Canada for a
period longer than two years. The hapless Chinese Diaspora rebelled by refusing to celebrate Dominion Day, terming it instead as Humiliation day. The practice continued until the repeal of this Act in 1947. Noted writer Wayson Choy later wrote in *The Jade Peony*,

Poverty stricken bachelor men were left alone in Gold Mountain, with only a few dollars left to send back to China every month and never enough dollars to buy passage home. Dozens went mad; many killed themselves. The Chinatown Chinese called July 1st, the day celebrating the birth of Canada, the Day of shame (17).

Many efforts were made to suppress and drive the Chinese out of British Columbia, among the allegations made were the fact that they were unhygienic, a threat to white labour due to their ready willingness to work at low wages, China towns were considered dens for prostitution and opium consumption. Later the Japanese immigrants were accused of similar kinds of offences. However since the Chinese were essentially a male–dominated community with very few women, prostitution was a thing that was bound to happen. And the government’s policy of levying the Head Tax and then the Exclusion Act actually fuelled the practice.

Between the years 1875 and 1923 many laws were passed in British Columbia restricting the rights of the Chinese in Canada. A bill in 1884 was passed preventing them from acquiring crown land and diverting water from natural channels. There were laws denying them the right to perform skilled work in coal mines. The Provincial Home Act of 1893 excluded the Chinese from public homes for the aged. Their names were not included in the provincial voters list. They were barred from professions like law and pharmacy. They were also excluded from the municipal office, school boards, jury office
and election to provincial legislature. By the Provincial Elections Act of 1920, they were denied voting rights. Apart from these they were also denied liquor licenses or hand loggers’ licenses (Li, *Encyclopedia* 359).

Apart from these humiliating legislations, the Chinese were like other non-British subjects prevented from working in the civil services. Their fishing licenses were reduced, something which even the Japanese faced. In Saskatchewan they were disenfranchised in 1908 (Li, *Encyclopedia* 359). Later an attempt was made to pass a bill whereby white women would be prevented from working in Chinese restaurants. It however did not succeed.

Meanwhile, the awkward disproportion in the number of men to women among the Chinese population created problems. Valerie Mah, historian, called the Chinese community in Toronto between 1878 and 1924, a “bachelor society because of the absence of women”.

To prevent the threat of miscegenation to Canadian society, the import of Chinese prostitutes was believed to be a solution, but this too raised fears of the rise in number of the Chinese population as also the seduction of White boys (Van Dieren qtd in Dasgupta).

The question of willingness to work for low wages was also not really fair as the Chinese were deliberately given low wages in order to suppress them. They actually posed little threat to the white worker. Since the Chinese were mostly employed in the
unskilled sector, they were no threat to the whites. On the contrary, they actually left the skilled professions open for the whites exclusively.

According to an article published in the Illustrated London News in 1875, the position of the Chinaman and the Chinese question in America drew diverging opinions from the public. From one point of view he was looked upon “as the only means of developing the resources of the State. Cheap labour is scarce, and he is supposed to supply what, from this point of view, is considered to be the greatest want of the country… the greatest boon to the State.” At the same time others opined that he was the “the curse of the country” and the “ruin of everything”. The position of the Chinese in Canada was pretty much the same. He was exploited for his labour and industry but shunned for his colour and race. The so called “Chinese question” in Canada too was essentially about taking advantage of the Chinese for their labour, especially when the availability of white labour was irregular.

For the Chinese, the journey to Canada from his native village was not an easy task. It was only by a law in 1860 that the Chinese were given the freedom to immigrate and engage in services with British subjects and colonies. By the Burlingame Treaty, signed between China and the U.S.A, in Washington D.C. on 28th July 1868, the rights of the Chinese to migrate were recognized, and immigration to the United States of America was encouraged among other things. Though the treaty was vigorously opposed, modified and later even reversed by the Exclusion Act of 1882, it gave tremendous opportunities to all those who wished to seek a better life and the gates to emigration were literally
opened. The opportunity was welcomed like nothing before and hundreds of Chinese sought to find newer avenues in life across the seas. Life in America and subsequently in Canada was far from what the immigrant expected, apart from the discrimination and brutal marginalization he faced in society, the Chinese immigrant also had to contend with hostile laws.

The contribution of the Chinese to Canadian Nation building is no mean a factor, later when the Rail lines were completed, the Chinese moved on to other occupations always working patiently and skillfully often at the face of severe discrimination and open hostility. Towards the end of World War II, the government’s attitude towards the Chinese started changing. Many Canadians of Chinese ancestry had fought for Canada and tried thereby to prove their loyalty to Canada. Following the example of the U.S.A. Canada too repealed the Chinese Immigration Act and permitted passage to the Chinese after a long period of twenty four years. This historic event happened in 1947 when British Columbia granted voting rights to the Chinese. In Saskatchewan, the rights were given four years later.

The fortunes of the Chinese underwent a change for the better but did not change completely because Canada continued to favour whites when the question of immigration arose. In the words of the Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King in a speech made in the House of Commons on 1 May 1947, the attitude of the country is amply reflected.

Large-scale immigration from the orient would change the fundamental composition of the Canadian population. Any considerable oriental immigration would, moreover, be certain to give rise to social and economic problems…apart from the repeal of the Chinese Immigration Act and the
revocation of [the] order in council … regarding naturalization, the
government has no intention of removing the existing regulations respecting
Asian immigration unless and until alternative measures of effective control
have been worked out. (Li, Encyclopedia 360)

The Chinese population many of whom were Canadian citizens by birth felt
outraged and confused. Those who were Canada born could never identify with China
and considered Canada as their only home. The relaxations in the Immigration Act did
not include the Chinese. Bias, prejudice and racial discrimination continued to be the
highlights of Canada’s immigration policy. “The Cold War and the Sinophobia of the
1950s” also accounted for the double standards in Canada’s Immigration policy and
attitude towards Asians in general (Li, Encyclopedia 360).

In the years following 1947, the Chinese who entered Canada were mostly wives
and children of the immigrants. Between 1949 and 1955, 4,247 children and 3,325 wives
entered Canada improving the unbalanced ratio between Chinese men and women.
According to the Census of 1951, there were 32,528 Chinese residing in Canada with a
ratio of 374 men to 100 women, but with the immigration of women and children, the
ratio improved to 163 men to every 100 women. The number of Chinese also increased to
58,197 (Li, Encyclopedia 360). The Chinese being an enterprising and hardy community
battled each day to survive, though many went back to China, most remained to earn their
living by setting up businesses related to selling fish, running restaurants, laundries,
groceries, processing salmon and so on. Many of these were professions which the whites
preferred not to pursue. During the twenty four years of exclusion, the community
dwindled essentially into a society of bachelors. Denied rights of naturalization or
enfranchisement and treated harshly by both law and society, the Chinese migrant sought refuge in his ethnic enclave the Chinatown. Chinatown was where he could live and share problems with fellow Chinese who suffered the same humiliations. Due to the expensive head tax, few families could afford to send women to Canada. The Japanese who arrived in Canada much later, had an English speaking Nisei or second generation much earlier than the Chinese who in spite of their early entry to the country could not produce English speaking children as their community hardly had any female members. This was a deliberate move by the government to check the growth of the Chinese population in Canada.

The Chinatowns in the meanwhile remained as chief centers upholding Chinese culture, religion, custom and ritual. Chinese festivals were celebrated with great fanfare and gusto. People wore traditional clothes and in the face of a hostile environment found solace in familiar Chinese surroundings. These ghettos provided a sense of unity to the community and gave the necessary boost to preserve their culture and tradition in a society that perhaps challenged tradition and made way for the new. “Segregation forced minorities to create institutions similar to those enjoyed by the majority, that could provide a measure of activity to reassure them of their status as Americans” wrote Vine Deloria, Jr.\textsuperscript{6} This statement is also true to the situation of the Chinese Canadians, who tried to assert their own identity within a larger context of the Canadian. Slowly yet surely, the small ethnic ghettos grew and developed to become significant in their own ways and with the establishment of their community associations they learnt to find strength within their own community.
The first community based Chinese organization was the Zhong Hua Hui Guan or the Consolidated Benevolent Association in Victoria in 1884. It became mandatory for all Chinese immigrants to become its member. These associations became virtual governments that took care of everything from looking after the legal matters of the Chinese to organizing social events and even keeping in touch with China. Later they became important power centers from where the later generations learnt to demand equality and participation in National life. When the Chinese community joined Canada’s war against Japan, the society urged its members to boycott Japanese goods. Apart from the Consolidated Benevolent Association, several other associations also came up. Some were politically inclined or even modeled after Chinese secret societies. The Chinese National Council for Equality based in Toronto was an important Association that protested against discriminations against the Chinese and fought for their rights and equality.

The establishment of community based associations was an expression of Chinese solidarity on foreign soil. It was also an indication of their enterprising nature to make full use of small and limited resources available. Moreover without proper family life the single Chinese male found solace and happiness in the company of similarly discriminated fellow migrants. Thus such organizations became centres of unity, power and advancement for the Chinese providing a platform for a minority group to find comfort, voice and strength in the face of hostility. They also helped reiterate the fact that
the Canadian environment actually encouraged the establishment of resistant groups instead of encouraging a smooth merging into a hospitable society.

Along with their community life, the Chinese in Canada also tried to follow their traditional customs and practices to maintain a sense of unity and solidarity. At the same time they also pursued their religious practices mostly in a private fashion. Though the observation of rites and customs was elaborate in the Chinatowns since it helped to function as a unifying factor, nonetheless their religious practices were essentially observed with privacy. This was perhaps due to the fact that Chinese religious rites and customs were closely linked to the family structure (Lai, Paper and Paper 94). It could also be because they were a tight-knit community that faced discrimination and hostility, the Chinese upheld their sacred beliefs in a guarded manner to prevent any kind of desecration of their time honoured rituals and customs. It is but natural for a marginalized people to guard the practices of their forefathers in a dignified and private manner to avoid ridicule from the White society that held them with so much contempt. In fact:

The three most visible elements of Chinese religion in Canada are the many Chinese temples and monasteries, the public festivals, and perhaps more subtly, the burgeoning Chinatowns that offer general stores that sell the required artifacts for religious ritual observation and restaurants that serve as meeting places for family and community (Lai, Paper and Paper 94).

Though traditional Chinese culture included the celebration of many festivals, it has been noted that the Chinese in Canada preferred to celebrate and observe only some. Visits to temples and observation of the Qingming and Songzao festivals along with the Chinese Lunar New Year comprised the chief religious customs of the Chinese community in
Canada. Apart from these the Chinese also followed Christianity and Buddhism or even preferred to remain silent about their religious inclinations.

Statistics from the 1991 census of Canada show that 59 percent of Chinese Canadians reported no religious affiliation and 29 percent belonged to the Christian religion. About 12 percent said that they were Buddhist (Li, *Encyclopedia* 367).

Traditional Chinese religion has incorporated many aspects of western culture and Christian religion so much so that the belief that the Chinese religion would be totally different from that of Canada has almost become a myth. In Honk Kong, Christmas, New Year and Easter are celebrated along with traditional Chinese festivals like Chun Jie, the Chinese Lunar New Year, the Ching Ming Festival or Qing Ming Jie and Duan Wu Jie, the Dragon Boat Festival. (Li, *Encyclopedia* 367)

In reality, it is difficult to establish to what extent so-called traditional Chinese religions and customs are to be found in the Chinese-Canadian community, for even in mainland China and Hong Kong where most of the recent immigrants have immigrated, many traditional cultural aspects have undergone radical changes. (Li, *Encyclopedia* 367)

Though the relevance of religion in the lives of the Chinese-Canadians is on the decline the Chinese still observe some rituals usually in a private fashion. Before the 1970s only two Chinese temples were built, both in Victoria’s Chinatown. The Tam Kung Temple was built in 1875 which housed a ‘patron deity of Hakka Chinese and was considered a protector of fishers, sailors and seagoing merchants’. The Chinese community would visit the temple to ‘seek his advice on business decisions, wedding dates, and other important matters.’ the other important temple was opened in 1885 and was called the ‘Lie Sheng Gong’ or ‘The Palace of all Sages’. It housed the effigies of Zhao Yuantan, the God of
Wealth, Hua Tua, the God of Medicine, Tian Hou Niangmang, the Queen of Heaven, Guandi, the God of Righteousness and Kongzi or Confucius, China’s “First Teacher” (Lai, Paper and Paper 95)

An important festival of the Chinese community was Qingming at the beginning of the Third Lunar month. Traditionally, in China it involved visiting the graves of the ancestors, lighting incense and candles as also hosting a feast. The first generation of immigrants could not go back to China to visit the graves of their ancestors. “Instead members of various Chinese associations organized cemetery visits during Qingming to make offerings to their deceased friends out of their respect for them and to receive blessings from their spirits.” (Lai, Paper and Paper 95) The practice seems to bear resemblance to the Christian observation of ‘All Souls’ Day’ and ‘All Saints’ Day’ when families visit the graves of their loved ones and pay their respect to them. This in fact seems to suggest the universal commonality between people and their faiths thus blurring the differences between the races and raising the time-tested question of why discrimination when there is so much in common.

For the Chinese, New Year celebrations and preparations start early. Days before the end of the twelfth Lunar month, a fair would be organized in Vancouver’s Chinatown. The effigies on the doors of Chinese households that served as protectors would be changed and other festivities would be held. (Lai, Paper and Paper 100) Celebration of the Chinese New Year and the Qingming festival were the two most important festivals for the Chinese community in Canada. An important ritual practiced in Chinese
households was that of ‘Songzao’, the “Sending –off of the Kitchen Deity (ies)” (Lai, Paper and Paper 100) It surrounded the belief that on the twenty fourth day of the twelfth Lunar month, the holy spirit of the Kitchen deity would leave the household to report to the divine realms about the behaviour of the householders. So an elaborate farewell was given to appease the spirit in order to gain the benedictions of the Gods.

Traditional Chinese festivals like Qingming or Songzao all are linked to peoples’ lives. Whether it was to pay respect to the departed souls or to appease a deity to seek favours for the family they all have deep significance to the lives of the people who pray and celebrate to earn divine blessings. Poy writes in Passage to Promise Land about Lim a Chinese girl who met her Chinese-Canadian husband in Hong Kong:

My mother didn’t want to leave the graves of the ancestors, so she arranged to have another woman live with my father in America. From this woman were born six children. (54)

The importance of the caretaking of the graves is seen here where a woman would rather sacrifice her husband to another woman and bear the indignity of allowing another woman to live with him than not leave the graves of the ancestors. Culture and custom undoubtedly had a very powerful impact on Chinese women and society. Poy also interviewed Gina, a Chinese girl who like many Chinese boys and girls was conceived by her mother in China but never saw her father who went abroad to work. Later she too left China and came to Canada. About her religious inclinations she said:

I’m not religious, but we practice ancestral worship. (35)
With the passage of time and the impact of Canadian life and culture, things underwent many changes and Poy also recorded the statements of Chinese women who have been happy to embrace Christianity and live in Canada comfortably. Joyce a Chinese girl who was interviewed says:

We are Christians and follow religious teachings. We first became exposed to Christianity when we brought our children to Sunday school. I do believe children who go to Church are better children…We are very satisfied with our lives here in Canada. It’s nice to live in Canada, a free society. (68)

The advent of Christian missionaries and establishment of Churches together with conversions of the later generations marked the change in character of the Chinatowns. Most Chinatowns were in British Columbia but later spread to other states in Canada. The chief reason for the concentration of the Chinese population in British Columbia was perhaps its geographical position, facing as it did the Pacific Ocean, making travel to the west coast easier from China. Chinatowns published Chinese newspapers and opened Chinese schools and tried their utmost to uphold Chinese culture against the sweep of the dominant White culture. In Wayson Choy’s The Jade Peony, there are references to different Chinese accents and dialects spoken by the different characters to indicate the different places they had come from; in Fong Bates’s Midnight At the Dragon Café too there is reference to the particular dialect --- ‘the four counties’ dialect spoken by the characters. However in Canada, despite the variations in their languages the Chinese community was essentially a homogeneous community and united despite personal differences. The generation gap that surfaced between the different generations of
immigrants was also a natural phenomenon witnessed in other migrant communities as well.

In 1947 when changes came into the life of the Chinese immigrant racial discrimination began to be looked upon as unacceptable by the Canadian Government because it had signed the United Nations Charter of Human Rights. Moreover since the Chinese had contributed significantly in Canada’s participation in the war and more so since anti-Chinese legislation violated the UN Charter, the government of Canada had no option but to repeal the Chinese Exclusion Act and give citizenship rights to Chinese immigrants in 1947. Immigration to Canada was however restricted to the spouse and dependants of a migrant who had Canadian citizenship. The move was welcomed by the minority community. But for those who had suffered years of exclusion the new move was difficult to adjust to. Moreover their joy was short lived as China their original homeland turned into a Republic with the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 and supported the Communist North in the Korean War. The Chinese in Canada began to be viewed as agents of the People’s Republic of China and once again began to be looked upon with suspicion. With this event even the activities of the Chinese Associations in Canada began to be affected (Wickberg 231). No doubt this showed how closely the Chinese in Canada were bound to their homeland but it also reflected how the social and political upheavals in Asia could affect their lives in Canada.

An interesting phenomenon took place during the 1950s. Many Chinese started faking papers and entering Canada. Such people were called “paper sons”. They
comprised mostly of the young Chinese who bought fake birth certificates in China and Hong Kong and tried to pass themselves off as children of immigrants. The Canadian government had a difficult time dealing with them. A solution was arrived at when Douglas Jung the first Chinese Canadian MP introduced a private member’s bill in 1962, called Chinese Adjustment Program. It granted amnesty for paper sons and daughters if they confessed to the government. Hundreds of “paper sons” came forward until the amnesty period ended in 1973. The Chinese on their part alleged that such practices were a fall out of the government’s discriminatory policies. Chinese Canadians were made to answer a questionnaire sent by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and many also had to undergo the humiliation of having their bank balances investigated (Poy 42). The Chinese in Canada fought in a united manner to prevent the harassment of the Chinese people by government officials. The Shing Wah Daily condemned the government and asserted that being Chinese was not equal to being a criminal. (Poy 42) The unity of the Chinese community became evident in the face of a crisis. Chinese newspapers like the Shing Wah Daily helped voice the Chinese marginalized voice. Later when the Chinese were ridiculed or targeted on television, Chinese associations came up to their defense. This was again a clear indication of the unity within the group despite their personal differences. The willingness to adopt ‘paper sons’ was also a sign of bonding as it reflected the desire to help distressed members of their own community.

In 1971, with the introduction of the policy of Multiculturalism, institutional racism was allegedly eliminated and the Chinese felt safer and more accepted in Canadian society. The journey however from their remote villages, including months of
travel, sickness and poverty to the land of plenty was a back breaking one. A desire to either escape economic, social or political troubles or even personal misfortunes together with a lure for gold brought these hapless people across the continents and seas. It took about hundred years for the Chinese migrant to find dignity and acceptance in the society of his dreams. In the era of multiculturalism, the Chinese migrant is not alone in his struggle to create an identity and survive. Immigrants from other Asian nations underwent similar experiences. However owing to the fact that the Chinese arrived first in North America, the burden of their troubles seem weightier and longer. According to a National Household Survey, in the year 2011, the Chinese accounted for 4% of Canada’s total population and are among the second largest visible minority group in Canada; the largest being South Asians. Though immigration from Japan has fallen in the past decades, the rate of Chinese immigration is still high. As Canada openly invites people from all over the globe to build its growing economy and preserve its diverse identity, the Chinese community which is among its earliest contributors to the colourful mosaic still faces challenges. In the writings of the Chinese Diaspora, the pain of parting from the country of origin, the travails of settlement in a new land, the multiple discriminations faced and the peculiar challenges experienced, together with the problems of identity faced by the subsequent generations of migrants born in Canada are graphically brought out. The problem of assimilation in the host land is a common site of distress to any Diaspora community. The fight to create an independent identity and integrate the finest of the host country is an old one. The stubborn attitude of society, difficult laws and unstable political conditions made the life of the Chinese settlers far more problematic than they actually envisaged.
Both ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors contributed to their emigration. The hopes of a better life abroad and the crushing burden of poverty together with liberalization of laws at home gave the necessary motivation to the early immigrants. In the 21st century the primary motive for migration is to pursue higher studies and look for better job opportunities. Both skilled and unskilled workers are attracted to Canadian shores. The policy of Multiculturalism created better opportunities for migration. Yet, the question of parity and equality of treatment remains. Unrests in Canada over the presence of the Chinese in their society are not unknown. That Chinese students were monopolizing Higher education caused severe unrest in Canada, leading to widespread protests and the eventual formation of the Chinese Canadian National Council to better represent the Chinese community at the National level.

In the 1980s and 1990s Canada suffered terrible economic recessions whereas China was experiencing growth. Though earlier migrations to Canada from Hong Kong surpassed those of Greater China, soon Chinese immigration to Canada from the mainland outdid that from Hong Kong. The tilt in the balance caused by the dynamics of economic factors gave rise to a new migratory phenomenon and the creation of a new social institution--- the astronaut family. This unique phenomenon refers to those families that went back to China leaving behind their dependents to pursue education in Canada. Sometimes the bread winner of the family went back to China to work while the children and wife remained behind. At times the parents went to China leaving the children in Canada. Such a practice caused grave concern to the Canadian government since there
was a risk of the children falling to bad company in the absence of parental guidance. This form of transnational family deserves attention and throws light on emerging trends in migratory habits. It is from mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan that the Chinese have essentially immigrated. Yet in recent years there is a tendency among some families to retrack their journey thereby making the route taken by the immigrant ‘circulatory’. This is a trend seen not only on Canada but also in Australia, where some members of the family return to East Asia for economic purposes.

Today many Chinese are in the forefront of Canadian life. Previously, they suffered from various discriminations including ad hoc housing discriminations, mob violence. Official legislations to exclude them from rights like naturalization, voting and employment. Today the Chinese are seen in all spheres including politics, education, Government, both Federal and Provincial. Raymond Chan became the first ethnic Chinese to be appointed to the cabinet. Olivia Chow was elected in the 2006 Federal elections. Alan Lowe is believed to be the first Chinese Canadian Mayor of Victoria BC. Chinese immigrants in professional and technical fields are now entering the market in greater numbers. Many are also choosing not to live in Chinatowns which are increasingly becoming centres of tourist attraction and symbols of the old Chinese way of life. Many are commercial districts.

In an interview, replying to a question on how the Chinese are viewed or accepted in Canadian society today, writer Judy Fong Bates said:

… I think that the racism that the Chinese face today in Canada is perhaps more subtle than the racism that I had faced as a child and certainly not at all
anything compared to what my father faced. I would say that intermarriage is you know very, very common in Canada now but the Chinese who are newly arrived in Canada, some of them come with a lot of money, some of them buy up the big houses. They can be quite ostentatious in their taste, you know in their large house and their fast cars... so even though at one time we may have been considered outsiders and people were racist in an overt way, now I think racism if it shows at all is more in the form of resentment.

What Fong Bates says is true of the Chinese Canadian who is far more acceptable today and though Canadian society may not be so racist today, the degree to which the Chinese-Canadian suffers today is not anything compared to what his predecessors did.

The Chinese have not only intermarried and found acceptance in society but have also sought redress for past injustices. On 22nd June, 2006 Prime Minister Stephen Harper delivered a message of redress in the House of Commons. He apologized and offered compensation for the head tax once paid by the Chinese. Survivors or their spouses were to be paid $20,000 individually. About 82,000 Chinese paid the Head Tax to enter Canada until the Exclusion Act came into effect in 1923. On 15th May 2014, Premier Christy Clark apologized to the Chinese community in British Columbia for the racist and discriminatory policies imposed on the Chinese in the past. An acknowledgement was also made for the contribution of the Chinese Canadians to the culture, history and economic prosperity of British Columbia. The moves have helped ushered in a new era in Chinese Canadian history, relations and understanding.

Other than the English or the French, the Chinese are among the largest ethnic groups in Canada today and whose population is growing at a rate faster than the overall population. With all its dialects, Chinese is the third largest mother tongue spoken in
Canada. Though most know the official languages of English or French, some Chinese claim to only know their native tongue. Many Chinese Canadians are involved in Canada’s political life and in fact all spheres of life. More men than women work outside the home and inter marriages are a common story. Most are employed in scientific and technical fields.  

The history of the Chinese in Canada is dotted with events sensational, dramatic even pitiful and pathetic as also legislations that affected the lives of the common migrant. Beginning as mere sojourners who came in search of gold to settling down in ethnic enclaves and accommodating themselves in society, then facing shameful legislations including exclusion, then reversal of exclusion followed by naturalization, enfranchisement and redress, the Chinese immigrant has seen it all. Chinese immigrant writing is a deep emotional response to all these events and is a rich storehouse of the experiences of the Diaspora. When history is silent, literature speaks out loud. The writings of Wayson Choy, Sky Lee, Judy Fong Bates, Fred Wah, Terry Woo, Evelyn Lau and Larissa Lai to name a few, bear ample testimony to the experiences of the Chinese in Canada. Their writings not only epitomize the experiences of the Chinese in Canada but also illustrate the impact of the various legislations and regulations on the men and women of this community. Interestingly men and women have under gone different changes in their lives by the same experience. There will be an attempt to analyse this from the writings of the Chinese-Canadian writers who have tried to recreate the experiences of their community in the pages of fiction and reveal not only create a niche
for themselves in the corpus of World literature but have succeeded with aplomb in revealing startling truths hitherto quite unknown to the world.

The next chapter of this dissertation will focus on some writings of Wayson Choy, Fred Wah, Judy Fong Bates and Sky Lee who have written fiction based on the lives and experiences of the Chinese-Canadian to give to the world a true glimpse of what it has been like to be an immigrant in foreign soil. By reconstructing the experiences of the Chinese immigrants in Canada through their works an idea may be formed on the adversities faced by the minority migrant community, their hardy instinct for survival and heroic achievements in the host country. The influx of the Chinese in waves and the difficulties they surmounted to create their own niche in the vast expanse of Canadian society while at the same time sorting battles within the community forms the essential thrust of Chinese-Canadian writing. While looking at this from the different perspectives of the writers, how each writer has helped refashion Canadian writing per se by their contribution will be a major concern of the study. As Canadian society responded to the advent and accommodation of so many immigrants, it too underwent a change. The immigrant experience witnessed a two way interactive process that involved a series of challenges to both the immigrants as well as to the host land. This thesis will now look at this eventful and chequered history of the Chinese-Canadian relationship primarily from the social and historical point of view through the reflections in Chinese-Canadian writing in English. In later chapters it will compare the same with Japanese-Canadian history and writing and attempt a comparative study of the two.
ENDNOTES

1. Immigration and Ethnocultural Diversity in Canada.


7. *Immigration and Ethnocultural Diversity in Canada.*


10. *Chinese community gets apology from B.C. for historical wrongs.*
